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ABSTRACT

Assessment centers offer a way to solve the problems of validity and reliability in personnel selection. An assessment center conducts tests of administrative skills in which trained assessors observe and record candidates' job-related behaviors and reach a consensus assessment of each candidate's performance. To apply the assessment center model to Canadian education, researchers established a pilot project for principal selection within the Peel Board of Education, a large suburban school district near Toronto. Development of the center consisted of a seven-stage process: (1) job analysis, in which 32 measures of skills, knowledge, and personality were identified; (2) test development; (3) validation of test content; (4) setting of criteria for grading test performance; (5) training of assessors, to achieve scoring reliability and testing skill; (6) pilot testing, evaluation, and revision of the entire assessment procedure; and (7) implementation of the assessment center, including use of the assessment results. At present, the pilot project has passed through all but the implementation stage. Appended to this report are lists of the measures, skills, and assessment techniques used in the pilot project as well as a comparison of the project's measures with those yielded by a national survey of Canadian principals. (Author/RW)

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IMPROVING ADMINISTRATOR SELECTION PROCEDURES

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IMPROVING ADMINISTRATOR SELECTION PROCEDURES

Problem and Purpose

The problem being addressed is: How can we improve on the selection process presently being used to select school administrators. One basic assumption is that the data being used to make selection decisions are of less-than-desirable validity and reliability, hence the need to develop procedures which provide some assurance that judgments are based on data that are job-related (validity) and consistent (reliability).

The purpose of the project, therefore, is to improve the selection process by increasing the validity and reliability of data used in the selection decisions. To achieve this purpose, the author has chosen to adapt the assessment centre procedures (developed in industry) for use in the selection of school principals. Because these procedures result in trained assessors' assessments of job-related behaviors, advocates of assessment centres can claim highly valid and reliable data upon which to base selection decisions.

Assessment Centres

The beginning of the assessment centre movement is attributed to the AT & T/Bell System management assessment system developed by D. Bray in 1956. In the past ten years the list of organizations using assessment centres has grown to nearly 2,000 (Zemke, 1980). Assessment is most widely applied in business organizations in the United States and Canada, but world-wide interest is growing with principal interest in Great Britain, South Africa, Brazil, Japan and Australia. Government interest has spurted recently, particularly stimulated by the desire to provide equal employment opportunity and an

increased emphasis on career planning and management development for government executives (Moses and Byham, 1977).

The first application to the education field has been the assessment centre developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (Hersey, 1977). The purpose of this centre, as with all others, is to assess candidates with potential for success. Although the assessment centre procedures can be applied to any position, their use has been limited primarily to supervisory and management positions. In the centre sponsored by the NASSP the candidates are applicants for the position of school principal.

An assessment centre is a series of activities designed to elicit job-related behaviors which serve to predict performance on the job. The typical model focusses on skill behaviors, uses a team of trained assessors and relies on a consensus of assessor judgments based solely on observed behavior provided by the candidate in that setting. Hence these evaluative judgments constitute one set of data useful in making selection decisions. Most important, however, is the claim that these data are valid and reliable because they are the result of consensus agreement on direct observations of job-related behaviors.

This claim can be substantiated as long as certain standards are met:

1. Multiple assessment techniques must be used. At least one of these techniques must be a simulation. A simulation is an exercise or technique designed to elicit behaviors related to dimensions of performance on the job and requiring participants to respond behaviorally to situational stimuli. The stimuli present in a simulation parallel or resemble stimuli in the work situation. Examples of simulations include group exercises, in-basket exercises, interview simulations, fact-finding exercises and so on.

2. Multiple assessors must be used. These assessors must receive thorough training prior to participating in a center.

3. Judgments resulting in an outcome (for example, recommendation for promotion, specific training or development) must be based on pooled information from assessors and techniques.

4. An overall evaluation of behavior must be made by the assessors at a separate time from observation of behavior during the exercises.

5. Simulation exercises are used. These exercises are developed to tap a variety of predetermined behaviors and have been pretested prior to use to ensure that the techniques provide reliable, objective and relevant behavioral information for the organization in question. The simulations must be job-related.

6. The dimensions, attributes, characteristics, qualities, skills, abilities or knowledge evaluated by the assessment center are determined by an analysis of relevant job behaviors.

7. The techniques used in the assessment center are designed to provide information that is used in evaluating the dimensions, attributes or qualities previously determined.

The following kinds of activities do not constitute an assessment center:

1. Panel interviews or a series of sequential interviews as the sole techinque.

2. Reliance on a specific technique (regardless of whether it's simulation or not) as the sole basis for evaluation.

3. Using only a test battery composed of a number of pencil-and-paper measures, regardless of whether the judgments are made by a statistical or judgmental pooling of scores.

4. Single assessor assessment (often referred to as individual assessment), a measurement by one individual using a variety of techniques such as pencil-and-paper tests, interviews, personality measures or simulations.

5. The use of several simulations with more than one assessor where there is no pooling of data. That is, each assessor prepares a report on performance in an exercise, and the individual reports (unintegrated) are used as the final product of the center.

6. A physical location labelled an "assessment center" that does not conform to previously noted requirements.

(Standards and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations, 1979.)

The Standards also specify appropriate organizational policy, assessor training and participant rights, as well as validation issues that must be addressed.

The question of predictive validity is still unanswered in any unequivocal sense. In 1979, NASSP began a predictive validity study to determine the relationship between selection and on-the-job performance of those persons who had been processed in the NASSP Assessment Center. The results will not be available until 1984.

Previous research strongly supports the judgment that assessment centre technology, when applied to the selection of personnel in business and industry, has proven to be of value; furthermore, those involved as assessors have been positive about the value of the method (Jaffee and Frank, 1978; Myers, 1977).

Design and Procedures

The Peel Board of Education agreed to serve as the pilot school district in this project.*

In developing an assessment centre for use in the selection of principals in Peel, seven stages (sets of procedures) were identified: (1) Job Analysis, (2) Test Development, (3) Content Validation, (4) Criteria Setting, (5) Assessor Training, (6) Pilot, Evaluation and Revision of the Procedures, and (7) Implementation of the initial assessment centre.

1. Job Analysis. One of the first tasks of any assessment centre is to conduct a job analysis for the position in question. In this project, in order to ensure content validity, four separate data-collection procedures were used: (1) workshop results, using teachers, department heads, vice-principals, principals and superintendents, (2) interviews with a sample of principals,

*This Board, a large suburban school system immediately west of Toronto, has an administrative staff which includes 119 principals, 19 superintendents a a director of education.

(3) a survey of all principals, and (4) meetings with superintendents. The rationale for the four separate procedures was to ensure adequate input from (1) a cross-section of people who work with principals, (2) in-depth interviews with experienced role incumbents considered to be successful principals, (3) all those presently in the principalship, and (4) those who were responsible for the selection, supervision and evaluation of principals.

The results of the job analysis consisted of three categories of descriptors of areas of competence: (1) skills, (2) knowledge, and (3) personal characteristics. (See Attachment 1 for the list of descriptors.)*

2. Test Development. For purposes of this project, it was decided to focus on the identification of levels of competence in those skills considered to be of greatest importance for success as a school principal in the Peel Board of Education. The knowledge and personal characteristics criteria would be used with other data sources -- vita of experiences, recommendations, credentials, interviews.**

The ten skills ranking at the top of the list were considered to be the criteria used in the assessment centre; they were as follows (in order of priority): (1) decision-making, (2) judgment, (3) teacher evaluation, (4) communication, (5) problem-solving, (6) organization, (7) motivation, (8) planning, (9) program implementation and evaluation and (10) team-building.

The second part of this task was to develop operational definitions of these skills. (See Attachment 2 for these definitions.)

The third part of this task was to develop program materials useful for eliciting behaviors which would indicate levels of competence in these skills. Five categories of tasks were developed: (1) in-basket, (2) structured

*For further validation, see Appendix 7 for the results of a national survey conducted by the author.

**The results obtained from the assessment centre constitute one set of data to be used in the selection decisions. The selection process will include recommendations from previous supervisors, previous and present experiences and a variety of other data sources to be determined by the Board officials.

interview, (3) leaderless group, (4) teacher evaluation, and (4) program implementation and evaluation. (See Attachment 3 for the matching of assessment techniques and skills to be assessed.)

3. Content Validation. A workshop was developed to validate content. All the superintendents (19) examined the assessment centre materials and made recommendations for changes (through group consensus). The criterion used was the appropriateness of the material to the Peel setting. The objective was to create "real-life" test experiences for the candidates, thus ensuring a high degree of content validity.

4. Criteria-Setting. The same workshop, which extended for three days, was used to identify the range of responses and appropriate levels of acceptability (standards). The superintendents took the "tests" and, through group consensus, developed a range of "graded" responses. In this case, those supervisors who will be the assessors and decision-makers re selection were asked to develop the standards of performance. The assumption made here is that the actual supervisors will produce the most "appropriate" standards.

The next task, then, was to re-do the materials to agree with the recommended changes and to develop response scoring forms.

5. Assessor Training. A training session was developed for assessors. The major objectives were (1) to reach high reliability in scoring, (2) to become familiar with the materials and criteria to be used, and (3) to be skilled in the process required. For example, the assessor should be skilled in conducting the structured interview and the feedback sessions.

The approach employed to achieve these objectives was to put the assessors through the same procedures, using the same materials that the candidates will be using. Using role-play and videotaping, the assessors practised the process until a high level of reliability was reached in observation and scoring.

6. Pilot, Evaluation and Revision. The task here was to develop and test the program implementation plan for the assessment centre. Using the criteria of adequate content coverage (getting enough data on each candidate to assess competence in each of the skills) and acceptable cost (in terms of both man-hours and dollars), the plan developed consisted basically of a three-day workshop-like format, including a pre-session orientation and a post-session review and evaluation of the program. (See attachments 4-6 for program schedules.)

No plan will be perfect the first time through. Consequently, some changes in format, materials, training sessions, and scope and sequence can be expected. All changes should be made with certain criteria in mind -- validity, reliability, cost, practicality.

7. Implementation of Assessment Centres. Some comment should be made re the ongoing implementation of assessment centres. One concern has to do with security.

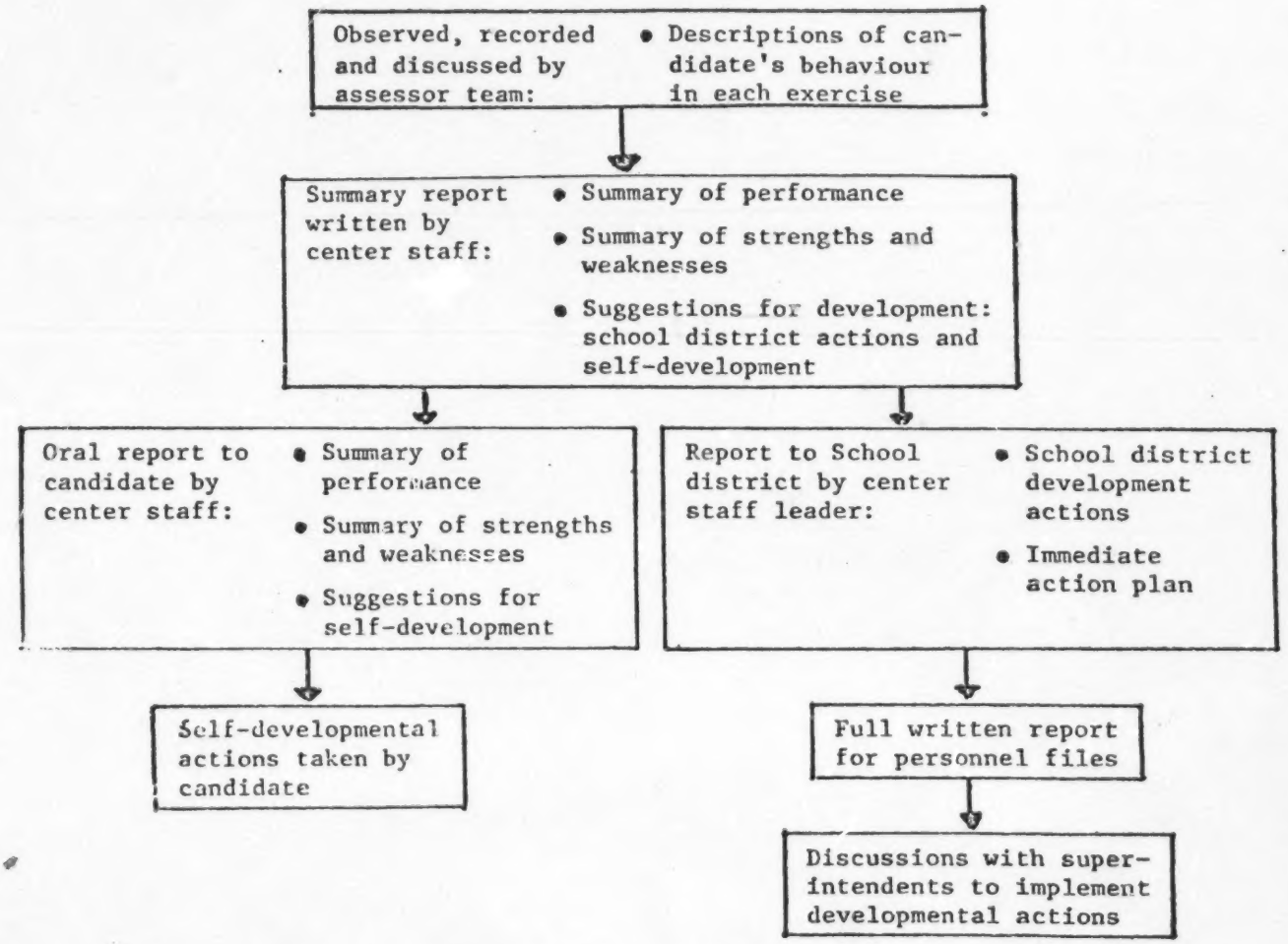
As with any materials used for assessment, security of test items and correct responses is essential, unless the plan calls for new items with each program administration. However, because of high costs in the development and production of materials, and because of the limited available test materials for this kind of program, the option of open access to materials is not desirable. Consequently, the only information to be released is (1) the list and description of skills/abilities to be assessed, (2) a general description of the assessment techniques to be employed, and (3) the deployment of the candidates' assessment results. With respect to the last item, it should be made clear to the candidate that he/she will be provided with the results, and that the results of the assessment constitute only one set of information to be considered in decisions affecting the candidate with respect to selection, assignment and/or professional development. Other sources of data such as one's vita of experiences, references and other standard sources will be included in personnel decisions.

Another matter of concern is the administration of the centre and the use of assessment information. The administrative tasks in the following list are essential to the success of assessment centre operations:

1. selecting assessors and candidates
2. scheduling of facilities and equipment
3. providing information to assessors and candidates
4. distributing materials to assessors and candidates prior to the centre
5. orienting the candidates
6. monitoring the use of facilities and equipment
7. monitoring the conduct of exercises
8. monitoring the observation and recording practices of assessors during exercises and providing guidance when appropriate
9. monitoring discussion of candidates by assessors
10. debriefing candidates following their participation
11. writing assessment reports
12. giving performance feedback to candidates after final evaluations are made and reports are written
13. controlling the flow of final assessment reports and other information generated at the center
14. ensuring the security of assessment materials.

The flow of information is diagrammed in the following chart:

(See next page)


Observed, recorded and discussed by assessor team:
• Descriptions of candidate's behaviour in each exercise
Summary report written by center staff:
• Summary of performance
• Summary of strengths and weaknesses
• Suggestions for development: school district actions and self-development
Oral report to candidate by center staff:
• Summary of performance
• Summary of strengths and weaknesses
• Suggestions for self-development
Report to School district by center staff leader:
• School district development actions
• Immediate action plan
Self-developmental actions taken by candidate
Full written report for personnel files
Discussions with superintendents to implement developmental actions

*All assessment data are confidential and available only to the candidate, the assessors and those involved in the selection decision.

It is most important that the assessment centre assume a diagnostic stance toward assessment. It is obvious that the data will be used in a summative sense -- to make recommendations for promotion or non-promotion. It must be equally obvious that the data will be used in a formative sense -- to assist the candidate by identifying areas in need of improvement. The school board then must make provision for follow-up with organizational support for the professional development of the candidate.

Problems of Measurement and Standards

Lest one believe that the assessment centre guarantees "objective" assessments of performance, a word of caution seems warranted In the final analysis, a varying amount of subjectivity will be evident. One cannot easily discount the contamination of personal style, personal characteristics and knowledge on judgments of another's performance. One cannot discount the influence of one's experience on the perception of another. Further, judgments must be made when translating observed behavior into a score. There is no "pure" way of moving from selected perception to a rating.

This is not to say that the assessment centre cannot contribute valid and reliable data. The point is that careful attention must be paid to training assessors and to monitoring the sessions in which consensus decisions take the form of candidate scores. The scores must be based on actual observed behavior. To do less would reduce the effectiveness of the assessment program, which should be judged by the extent to which it can produce evaluative data that are valid and reliable.

One final note. In this paper the author has described the development process used to establish an assessment centre program in one board. The next step is to implement and evaluate the program. This will be undertaken during the 1980-81 school year.

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5. Standards and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations (available from Consulting Associates, Inc., 24133 Northwestern Hwy., Suite 201, Southfield, MI 48075).

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Attachment 1

RESULTS OF THE JOB ANALYSIS FOR THE POSITION OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Highest Ranking Skills/Abilities, Knowledge, and Personal Characteristics

	Skills/Abilities	Knowledge	Personal Characteristics
1.	Decision-making	Implementation Strategies	Sincerity
2.	Judgment	Curriculum and Program Evaluation	Dependability
3.	Personnel (Teacher) Evaluation	Change Strategies	Tolerance for Others
4.	Communication (listening, speaking, writing)	Community Needs	Confidence
5.	Problem-solving	Student Evaluation	Sense of Self-worth
6.	Organizational	Teaching Methodologies	Maturity
7.	Motivational	Learning Theory/Implications for Practice	Sensitivity
8.	Planning	School Law	Enthusiasm
9.	Program Implementation and Evaluation	School District Policies	Consistency
10.	Team-building	Operating Procedures	Sense of Humour
11.		Board Policy	
12.		Ministry Regulations	

Attachment 2

SKILLS/ABILITIES

1

1. Decision-making Ability

Capability to

- gather information and utilize resources from varied sources
- perceive and evaluate alternatives
- analyse impact of decisions before executing them
- make decisions compatible with organizational goals
- take a problem-solving approach to decision-making
- support decisions with appropriate evidence and rationale
- take into account the needs of both the organization and the individuals most affected by the decision

2. Judgment Ability

Capability to

- analyse problems with an open mind
- process information from a variety of sources
- provide a rationale for the assumptions and the decisions made
- explain the relationships among the problem variables, the assumptions, the situational variables and the decision consequences
- set priorities
- critically evaluate

3. Teacher Evaluation Skills

Capability to

- describe effective teaching behaviors
- collect valid and reliable observation data re classroom activity
- prescribe assistance relevant to teacher needs
- write meaningful evaluations

4. Communication Skills

Capability to

- listen effectively
- respond clearly and directly (oral and written)
- write and speak appropriately for the situation
- prepare clear, concise reports or records (oral and written)
- interpret instructions (oral and written)
- describe or explain information, concepts, ideas or instructions (oral and written)

5. Problem-solving Ability

Capability to

- determine the important elements of the problem
- collect appropriate information
- develop reasonable alternatives
- use appropriate resources in developing solutions
- develop an appropriate rationale for the decisions selected
- make reasonable predictions of effects of the decision(s)

6. Organizational Ability

Capability to

- set priorities
- plan and monitor activities
- establish schedules and deadlines
- coordinate resources toward fulfillment of desired objectives
- control and/or adapt to interruptions, changes, disorder, repetition without losing efficiency or effectiveness
- identify relationships among activities

7. Motivation Skills

Capability to

- identify staff needs
- relate staff needs to organizational needs
- identify ways of satisfying staff and organizational needs

8. Planning Skills

Capability to

- define the parameters of the task and desired objective(s)
- gather relevant data from appropriate sources
- identify all relevant factors or restrictions
- apply logical reasoning to determine relationships of variables
- make valid assumptions

9. Program Implementation and Evaluation Skills

Capability to

- identify and describe the procedures of a sound program evaluation plan
- interpret program assessment data
- report program assessment data
- draw appropriate conclusions from program data
- make appropriate recommendations

10. Team-building Skills

Capability to

- work co-operatively with a variety of individuals
- recognize strengths and limitations of self and others
- gain the confidence and trust of others
- exhibit appropriate sensitivity to feelings of others
- fulfill shared-leadership role(s) as required to achieve group cohesiveness

Attachment 3

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

	In-basket Exercise	Structured Interview	Program Implementation/ Evaluation	Leaderless Group	Teacher Evaluation
1. Decision-making	X	X		X	
2. Judgment	X	X	X	X	X
3. Teacher Evaluation		X			X
4. Communication	X	X	X	X	X
5. Problem-solving	X	X		X	
6. Organizational	X	X	X	X	
7. Motivation		X		X	X
8. Planning	X	X	X	X	X
9. Program Implementation and Evaluation		X	X		
10. Team-building		X		X	X

NATIONAL SURVEY

In order to check the generalizability of the job analysis results of the Peel administrators, a survey was taken of Canadian principals during the spring of 1980.

A random sample of all school principals in Canada yielded the following population:

34 principals: school size up to 200 students

112 principals: school size 200 - 799 students

9 principals: school size 800 or more students

The degree of response was 82 per cent (omitting 8 per cent returns received after the deadline).

The results, taking into account all schools in the Canadian sample, indicate that the Peel population is generalizable to the principals of Canada. (See the attached lists for a comparison.)

LIST 1

Top 10 Skills (in order of priority)

	Peel	Canadian Sample
1.	Decision-making	Negotiation
2.	Judgment	Decision-making
3.	Teacher Evaluation	Organization
4.	Communication	Communication
5.	Problem-Solving	Conflict Management
6.	Organization	Judgment
7.	Motivational	Teacher Evaluation
8.	Planning	Problem-Solving
9.	Program Implementation & Evaluation	Program Implementation & Evaluation
10.	Team Building	Planning

Differences

+ Motivational	+ Negotiation
+ Team Building	+ Conflict Management

Note: Questionnaire listed 24 skills; respondents indicated degree of importance on a scale 1-5.

LIST 2

Top 10 Areas of Knowledge (in order of priority)

	Peel	Canadian Sample
1.	Implementation Strategies	Curriculum and Program Evaluation
2.	Curriculum and Program Evaluation	School District Policies
3.	Change Strategies	Student Evaluation
4.	Community Needs	Community Needs
5.	Student Evaluation	Teaching Methodologies
6.	Teaching Methodologies	Change Strategies
7.	Learning Theory/Implications For Practice	Ministry Regulations
8.	School Law	Operating Procedures
9.	School District Policies	Learning Theory/Implications For Practice
10.	Operating Procedures	School District Resources

Differences

+ Implementation Strategies	+ Ministry Regulations
+ School Law	+ School District Resources

Note: Questionnaire listed 20 areas of knowledge; respondents indicated degree of importance on a scale 1-5.

LIST 3

Top 10 Personal Characteristics (in order of priority)

	Peel	Canadian Sample
1.	Sincerity	Dependability
2.	Dependability	Sincerity
3.	Tolerance for Others	Consistency
4.	Confidence	Flexibility
5.	Sense of Self-Worth	Enthusiasm
6.	Maturity	Tolerance for Others
7.	Sensitivity	Confidence
8.	Enthusiasm	Initiative
9.	Consistency	Energy
10.	Sense of Humour	Sense of Self-Worth

Differences

+ Tolerance for Others	+ Flexibility
+ Maturity	+ Tolerance for Others
+ Sensitivity	+ Initiative
+ Sense of Humour	+ Energy

Note: Questionnaire listed 22 personal characteristics; respondents indicated degree of importance on a scale 1-5.

ADDENDUM

Improving Administrator Selection Procedures

Due to delay in decisions at the school board level, the initial testing of the assessment center, referred to as the Leadership Assessment Program (LAP), was delayed until the spring of 1981.

Consequently, the results of the subsequent stages of the study with respect to the follow-up of those selected for the position of school principal, will be delayed until the fall of 1982.

D. Musella